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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY

30 October 1958

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USSR APPROACHES SHOWDOWN ON NUCLEAR TEST-BAN ISSUE

The Soviet leaders probably view the Geneva talks on a nuclear test-cessation agreement, opening on 31 October, as the climax of their intensive efforts over the past three years to make this the central issue in the East-West disarmament debate. The USSR, however, faces the severest test of its pose as the world's principal advocate of halting nuclear tests. The announcement on 22 August by the United States and Britain of a conditional one-year suspension of tests beginning on 31 October has confronted Moscow with a difficult challenge to its long-standing attempts to blame the West for failure to agree on a test ban.

Soviet maneuvers such as the unilateral test suspension last March and concessions to ensure the success of last summer's Geneva technical talks on a

test-detection system have been based on the assumption that the United States and Britain, in a showdown, could be expected to reject any agreement to halt tests which was not linked to progress on other aspects of disarmament. Moscow's successive proposals, therefore, have been aimed at increasing pressure on the West to accept an unconditional test ban by appearing to meet Western objections to the USSR's terms.

In view of this pattern of Soviet policy, the Soviet negotiators at Geneva probably will concentrate on discrediting the American and British position; this makes an extension of their one-year test suspension contingent on the installation of an effective inspection system and satisfactory progress in reaching agreement on and in implementing other substantial arms control measures.

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~~SECRET~~

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY

30 October 1958

The Russians probably will press for an immediate "political decision" on an unconditional and permanent test ban, while insisting that elaboration of an inspection system--a Western condition for agreement--can be discussed subsequently. While the Soviet delegates probably will be prepared to discuss controls, they will seek to minimize and defer this problem by pointing out that the Geneva technical experts already have unanimously agreed that a control system is "possible and feasible."

The USSR's reaction to the Anglo-American announcement of 22 August and its proposals for a test-cessation agreement suggest that the Soviet leaders continue to believe they have more to gain by constantly seeking to make the West appear responsible for blocking a test-cessation agreement than by assuming the far-reaching commitments involved in a test ban enforced by a control system acceptable to Washington and London. This line of action reflects Moscow's basic estimate that the nuclear stalemate will continue indefinitely and that the psychological aspects will dominate the East-West struggle.

In this situation, the USSR's fundamental aim is to stigmatize nuclear weapons by all the diplomatic and propaganda means at its disposal, thereby inhibiting the West's willingness to use them, but without sacrificing Soviet freedom of action by accepting the restraints that would be imposed by an effective control system.

Soviet Policy Since 1957

Moscow's maneuvers over the past year to force a clear-cut showdown with the West on the issue of a test ban separate from all other aspects of disarmament have centered on undercutting the West's contention that Soviet opposition to effective

controls is the principal barrier to a termination of tests. The USSR's proposal in the London talks on 14 June 1957 for a two- to three-year suspension under international control was the initial attack on what Moscow regarded as the most vulnerable point in Western position.

Before introducing this ostensible concession, however, the Russians had carefully probed the firmness of the United States' position, which held that a test ban could not be separated from other aspects of the nuclear problem. The American delegate at the talks stated that the United States would not agree to a temporary cessation except as part of an agreement including a commitment to a cutoff date on the production of fissionable material for nuclear weapons. This apparently convinced the Soviet leaders that the Western powers would not accept any formula for an unconditional ban.

In his 31 March 1958 speech to the Supreme Soviet, Foreign Minister Gromyko stated that the USSR's proposal--for a two- to three-year suspension enforced by an international commission with control posts in the USSR, the United States, Britain, and the Pacific area, including Australia--was intended "to prevent the opponents of a cessation of tests from subterfuges." He declared that after the West had rejected this proposal, "it became clear...that this was not at all a matter of control but of stubborn unwillingness of certain circles of the Western powers to limit the nuclear arms race."

USSR's Unilateral Suspension

The unilateral suspension of Soviet tests decreed by the Supreme Soviet on 31 March 1958 was the boldest stroke in Moscow's long campaign to force the Western powers to take an

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY

30 October 1958

unequivocal stand on the test-ban issue and to arouse worldwide resentment toward American and British nuclear policies. This move was timed to place the forthcoming Western tests in the worst possible propaganda light. The Soviet leaders took a calculated risk that they could unilaterally suspend tests for some time without incurring serious military or technological disadvantages. They reasoned they would be free to resume testing at a date of their choosing because the United States and Britain would not counter with proposals which would call the Soviet bluff.

The Supreme Soviet decision carefully paved the way for a resumption of Soviet testing by stipulating that should the United States and Britain continue their tests, the USSR would "act freely in the question of testing...bearing in mind the interests of the security of the Soviet Union."

Geneva Technical Talks

The next move in the Soviet campaign to heighten pressures on the West to take an unequivocal stand on an unconditional test ban was Khrushchev's acceptance on 9 May 1958 of President Eisenhower's earlier proposals for technical talks on methods of detecting violations of a possible test-cessation agreement. This step constituted a marked departure from the USSR's previous insistence that all negotiations on international control of any aspect of disarmament could come only after agreements had been concluded in principle.

This reversal of position was partly motivated by the need to offset the damaging effects of Moscow's abortive charges of US nuclear bomber flights over the Arctic toward Soviet frontiers. Moscow had called an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council in which the So-

viet charge backfired badly, and the Soviet delegate was maneuvered into having to veto an American proposal for an international inspection zone in the Arctic to prevent surprise attack.

During the exchange of notes between Moscow and Washington on plans for the technical talks, the USSR sought increasingly to extract from the United States at least a tacit commitment that the talks must lead to an agreement to end tests. The Soviet note of 13 June attempted to establish a link between the technical discussions and a decision to end tests by stating that the USSR "proceeds from the assumption... that as a result (of the quick conclusion of the talks) agreement will be reached on the suspension of nuclear weapons tests by all powers possessing them."

On 25 June, Moscow sent a further note which charged that, by failing to agree that the talks must result in a test ban, the United States was "dooming the conference to failure beforehand." The note implied a threat to boycott the meeting unless the United States "confirmed" that the talks "must be subordinated" to the task of achieving a test-cessation agreement.

This overnight reversal, which may have resulted from Khrushchev's personal intervention, was an attempt to wring from the United States a last-minute acceptance of the principle of an unconditional test ban, or failing that, to delay the talks and thereby generate new pressures on Washington to change its position. But the USSR backed down and sent its delegation to Geneva after the United States had reaffirmed its position and had announced that the American scientists were proceeding as scheduled.

It soon became apparent that the USSR wanted the talks

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~~SECRET~~

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY

30 October 1958

to succeed and was making considerable concessions to achieve this end. The American chairman of the Western delegation observed on 25 July that, in every important case, the Soviet bloc delegates had accepted the major elements of the Western position, agreeing to points which the Western scientists did not believe at the outset they would accept.

These unusually conciliatory tactics were governed by Moscow's expectation that an agreement on test-cessation methods would create heavy pressure on the West to accept a separate and unconditional test ban. The Russians believed that any Western failure to follow through on a technical agreement would place the United States and Britain in an extremely difficult position and appear to confirm Soviet charges that Western insistence on control was merely a means of evading a test ban.

Subsequent statements by Soviet leaders strongly suggest that the concessions at Geneva, like Moscow's proposal of June 1957 for control posts to enforce a two- to three-year test suspension, were aimed at further discrediting the Western claim that the USSR was responsible for failure to reach agreement because of its opposition to an effective control system. Khrushchev declared on 30 August that the Geneva agreement had "finally buried the legend about the alleged impossibility of control over the observance of an agreement to end nuclear tests." He underscored the USSR's acceptance of the Geneva recommendations and stated, "There can now be no excuses or justifications for refusing to end at once and everywhere the experiments with nuclear weapons."

US-UK Suspension

The announcement by the United States and Britain on

22 August 1958 of a conditional one-year suspension of testing seems to have caught the Soviet leaders off balance. They immediately recognized this as a major challenge to their strategy. The Western initiative greatly complicated Moscow's plans for exploiting the Geneva technical agreement to embarrass Washington and London.

Khrushchev's reply came on 30 August in a Pravda interview in which he sought to discredit the announcement as just "another attempt to lull the vigilance of the people showing legitimate concern at the continuing nuclear tests carried out by the United States and Britain on an ever larger scale." He insisted that the announcement did not really change the Western position and that Washington and London "are still looking for loopholes to avoid an instant suspension of tests." He dismissed the proposal to stop testing for one year as of "no importance whatsoever, for a year is precisely the period necessary for preparing another series of nuclear tests."

As for the Western proposal to extend the suspension one year at a time, Khrushchev charged that the United States and Britain "hedge this agreement with such reservations and conditions that it becomes clear they have no real intention of renouncing further tests of nuclear weapons."

Khrushchev then moved to bolster the Soviet position for a major showdown in the negotiations which the United States and Britain proposed for 31 October. His most immediate concern was to counter any impression that their tests last summer had given the Western powers a commanding lead in the nuclear race. His great sensitivity on this point was reflected in his charge that the Western powers had attempted to exploit the Soviet moratorium to gain "unilateral military

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~~SECRET~~

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY

30 October 1958

advantages for themselves." After recalling that the Supreme Soviet decision of 31 March had stipulated that if the other powers continued their tests, the USSR would be "free to act as it sees fit," Khrushchev declared that the Western tests "relieve the Soviet Union of the obligation it had assumed unilaterally."

Test Resumption

On 11 September, Moscow announced that Northern Sea maneuvers would be held from 20 September to 25 October, "with actual use of various types of modern weapons." Soviet propagandists poured out a growing stream of arguments designed to explain and justify the forthcoming test resumption. Gromyko sought to offset the adverse effects of the new tests by calling on the UN General Assembly on 16 September to endorse a "universal cessation" of tests "for all time."

On 1 October, the day after the USSR resumed testing, Moscow sent notes to the United States and Britain proposing that the Geneva conference be held at the foreign ministers' level--a move timed to create the impression of a new Soviet "initiative" and to demonstrate the importance the USSR attaches to these talks. Gromyko's 7 October press conference statement that the Soviet Union "has all grounds to discontinue its tests only after it conducts the same number of such tests as were held by the United States and Britain" since 31 March was intended to underscore the rationale for resuming tests. Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin on 27 October reiterated Gromyko's stand in rejecting the Western proposal for a one-year ban and reserved the right to match the number of Western tests since 31 March if the Geneva talks fail.

Geneva Tactics

Moscow's negotiating tactics probably will be to make its demand for an immediate, permanent, and unconditional test cessation the key issue. The Soviet delegate will contend that the first order of business must be to conclude a definitive "political" agreement on test cessation. He probably will take the position that the Geneva technical talks have demonstrated the feasibility of an effective control system and that therefore there should be no difficulty in spelling out such details as the nature of the supervisory body, the composition of inspection teams, location of control posts, and the immunities and privileges of inspection personnel after the basic political agreement has been signed.

In his 30 August Pravda interview, Khrushchev defined the purpose of the conference as being "to conclude an agreement to end for all time tests of atomic and hydrogen weapons of all kinds by all states." He made no mention of the control problem, dismissing its importance with the statement: "Considering the positive results of the Geneva conference of experts, these negotiations could be brought to a conclusion within two or three weeks."

If in the course of the Geneva conference the Soviet leaders conclude that the United States and Britain will not abandon their position making the extension of a one-year suspension contingent on installation of an effective control system and "satisfactory progress" toward agreement on such measures as limitation and reduction of fissionable material for weapons purposes, they may drop their demand for a "permanent" cessation and reintroduce the June 1957 plan for a two- to

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CURRENT INTELLIGENCE WEEKLY SUMMARY

30 October 1958

three-year suspension under international control.

Prevention of Surprise Attack

The USSR apparently will seek to establish a close link between the technical talks on measures to prevent surprise attack--scheduled to open in Geneva on 10 November--and the conference on nuclear-test cessation. Soviet notes have stressed that any agreement on surprise attack must be made contingent on "definite steps" in the disarmament field, particularly a test-cessation agreement. Moscow's note of 15 September explicitly rejected the American view that surprise-attack talks should take place without prejudice to the positions of the two governments on the timing and interdependence of the various aspects of disarmament. The fact that the test-cessation conference will open just ten days before the surprise-attack talks in the same city will facilitate Soviet efforts to underline the close relationship between these questions.

Moscow's acceptance on 2 July of President Eisenhower's earlier proposals for technical talks on the surprise-attack problem probably was motivated primarily by the need to over-

come the adverse effects of the abortive Soviet charges against alleged Arctic flights of American nuclear bombers and the executions of the leaders of the Hungarian revolt announced in mid-June. Khrushchev's letter took the line that the surprise-attack problem had become "especially acute" because of the bomber flights.

Soviet tactics at the conference probably will be centered on repeating previous Soviet schemes calling for the establishment of control posts at railway junctions, large ports, and highways, and reciprocal aerial inspection in "zones of concentration of military forces" in central Europe and in equal portions of the Soviet Far East and the western United States. Soviet negotiators can also be expected to stress that solution of the surprise-attack problem is bound up with the settlement of other questions, such as renunciation of the use of nuclear weapons and missiles, creation of an atom-free zone in Europe, a nonaggression pact between NATO and Warsaw Pact members, abolition of foreign bases, and reduction of foreign forces in Germany and other European states.

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